
LEGACIES OF VIOLENCE: UNDERSTANDING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN MEMPHIS, TN

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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

- Intimate Partner Violence refers to the employment of sexually, psychologically, emotionally, or physically coercive acts against an intimate partner.
- *TRIGGER WARNING
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience such violence in Shelby County. (WREG)
- The Memphis Police Department reports responding to more than forty IPV related calls a day, an overwhelming statistic that does not even account for the totality of intimate partner violence occurrences given that 50-70% of cases go unreported.
- Furthermore, over half of all violent crime in Memphis is classified as intimate partner violence.
- Women of color, poor women, and members of LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence

THESIS

- I argue that intimate partner violence continues to be a major issue in the city of Memphis, over thirty years since the Women's Shelter Movement, because of the way in which Women's Shelter advocates developed an incomplete discourse of understanding intimate partner violence and the way in which advocates across the country and specifically in Memphis appealed to Southern ideologies that dictate who is a victim and who is not.



CENTERING WHITENESS THROUGH THE WOMEN'S SHELTER MOVEMENT:

- The Women's Shelter Movement: emerged from the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970's
- Memphis Chapter of the National Organization of Women (N.O.W) worked to establish the city's first rape crisis hotline and other local services for survivors
- Black feminist Leathia Thomas stated in 1976 :“I viewed NOW as being white and therefore suspect. Black people have been used to gain benefits for white people, so I don't think black women will be found flocking to NOW or anything that is primarily trying to do something for women” (Gilmore 50)
- “domestic violence could happen to anyone”
- Painting intimate partner violence as an epidemic equally impacting every woman in society rather than an act of power and dominance that disproportionately affects vulnerable communities.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN

- White feminist developed a dominant discourse of intimate partner violence that viewed such violence exclusively in terms of gender
- Black women's experience of violence originates in slavery where white men "physically owned black women's bodies" and employed sexual violence "to demonstrate that a black woman's body was never her own" (McGuire xviii)
- The Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor, an organization helped founded by Rosa Parks to combat sexualized violence against African American women in the South, reports in Memphis in 1945: "Two negro girls were forced into a police car, taken for a ride in the country and criminally assaulted by two uniformed policemen" (McGuire 37)
- White feminist discourse of IPV/gender based violence failed to encapsulate the experiences of all victims, as demonstrated by women of color who experienced "an anti-black misogyny that imagined all black women as disposable laborers and disposable bodies" (Robinson 10).

WHITE VICTIMHOOD, CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD, AND ANTEBELLUM IDEOLOGIES OF CONTROL

- The Cult of True Womanhood, a 19th century ideology that defined a woman's virtue in terms of her "piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. (Lavender)
- Writing in "The Free Speech and Headlight of Memphis" in 1892, Ida B. Wells argues "the myth of the black male rapist" served to justify violence against black men and "keep them in their place" by painting them as a threat to white women. (Robinson)
- Black women were considered "promiscuous", "immoral" and "less deserving of protection from violence or sexual exploitation" (Fenton 23).
- Fenton uses the term "lynch mob ideology" to describe how these interconnected racist and sexist ideas played a role in maintaining antebellum and post-War southern hierarchy. Fenton argues that these ideologies: "serve to scapegoat some (black men); revictimize others (white women); formulate the disappearance of many (black women); and relieve most everyone else (white men) from responsibility" (Fenton 26).

APPEALING TO “LYNCH MOB IDEOLOGIES”: CASTING WHITE WOMEN AS THE FACE OF IPV VICTIMIZATION

- Advocate, Susan Kelly-Dreiss states: “the public hold many myths about battered women—they are poor, they are women of color, they are uneducated, they are on welfare, they deserve to be beaten and they even like it” (Crenshaw 20).
- Women’s Shelter Movement advocates casted white (hetero/cis) middle class women as the face of domestic violence victimization figuring that “while politicians may not have been terribly interested in the problems of poor black women, it was easier to sell them on the need to protect their own mothers, sisters, and daughters” (Goodmark 14).
- “This same group of activist (from the Memphis NOW Chapter) fell back on the notion of protecting women’s bodies, relying (however silently) on local and regional fears of rape and desires to protect (white) women from black men...By appealing to these local and social conditions “rape and violence against women were not contested in part because these concerns allowed Southerners to protect, rescue, and save women in spite of the fact that it also meant addressing feminist issues” (Gilmore 67).

CONSEQUENCES OF INCOMPLETE DISCOURSE

- The Women's Shelter Movement's incomplete discourse of intimate partner violence "facilitated the ascendancy of the domestic violence/criminal justice paradigm" (Weissman 4)
- The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 was passed as a part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act
- "The incarceration rate for African Americans has increased by 50% since 1980, while the incarceration rate for whites has fallen slightly" (MLK 50th Poverty Report)
- VAWA has primarily been used to fund police, prosecutors, and jails

RELIANCE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

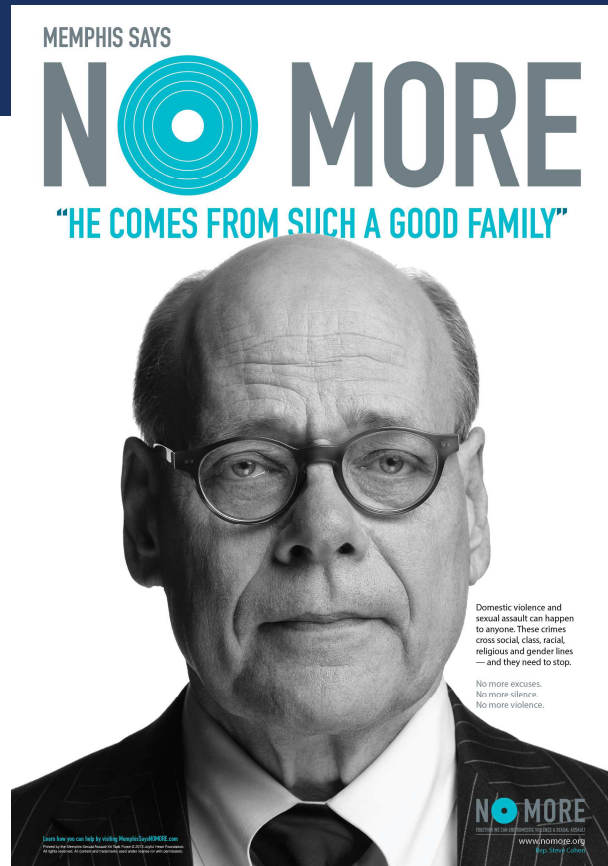
- A study by the Family Safety Center and Sister Reach with survivors who identified as black women, black transgender women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or gender nonconforming persons, confirms this distrust with only 3 of the 71 participants reported having a positive experience with law enforcement.
- An overwhelming number of people across groups, but specifically in the LGBTQ+ focus groups reported that officers verbally harassed them, stating things such as: “all you need is some good dick (penis) and you will be alright” (11)
- “With police showing up and they don’t give a damn...It’s almost like your abuser is right when they say: ‘Nobody is going to believe you, nobody can protect you.’ You know when they tell you that and get that in your head. And then the system, reinforces it. It makes victims feel like “wow, they really don’t care.” You know? They really can’t protect me.

ASSUMPTIONS OF SAFETY

- Investing in legal system assumes that victims trust the legal system and “should want to leave their abusers”
- “If they stay with their abuser, they can know when the next attack is coming and protect themselves accordingly. If they leave, they do not know their abusers whereabouts leaving them in a constant state of imminent danger.” -
-A Memphis Social Worker
- “Divorced and separated victims report being battered fourteen times as often as women living with their abusers and account for 75% of all battered victims killed by their abusers (Goodmark 2004)
- Receiving an Order of Protection requires reliving trauma and facing abuser
- Order of Protection—only lasts for one year

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE LAWS

- Misdemeanor in Memphis
- Max amount of jail time is 11 months, 29 days
- Abusers are rarely arrested. In the case of arrest, research confirms that domestic violence arrest involve disproportionately high numbers of poor men, African American men, and Latinos (Ms. Foundation for Women: Safety Program)
- “With victims of color be more likely to be processed by the criminal legal system as offenders while their white counterparts have a better chance of being treated as victims and referred to services” (Gilfus 2002)



MEMPHIS

- “In 2015, the Memphis Police Department was found pattern of misconduct towards female victims of crime, including abuses such as an MPD detective leaking confidential investigative information regarding a rape victim and the department failing to test hundreds of rape kits (Chapman 2017)
- Former Mayor Wharton says there is no more saying the “victim is a known prostitute” (Rufener 2015).
- In response to these allegations Shelby County Commissioners approved more than \$51,000 for the Sheriff’s Office to “battle domestic violence” in 2015.

